



"WHEN DEVELOPING ZELDA FOR THE NINTENDO DS, WE ALWAYS KEEP OUR EYES OPEN FOR INTERESTING IDEAS."

SPIRIT GUIDE

Daiki Iwamoto, the director of *The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks*, tells us why Link conducts a train, how Zelda became playable, and why Hyrule has been overrun by rabbits.





The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks isn't just another great adventure game; it's also one of the series's most unique installments in recent memory. With a mix of play styles ranging from conducting a train to directing a possessed suit of armor, the game holds fresh challenges and surprises for even the most experienced Zelda fans. Spirit Tracks also introduces memorable new characters, gives us a story that finally teams Princess Zelda with Link on his adventure, challenges players with some of the most demanding dungeons of any Legend of Zelda game, and debuts fun and useful new weapons and items that let Link crack a whip, whirl the wind, shift sand, and more. Many of us here at Nintendo Power are on our second playthrough, and with the game fresh in our minds, we asked Daiki Iwamoto, the game's director, to take us on a behind-the-scenes tour of his team's latest creation.

NINTENDO POWER First a boat, and now a train—why do the Zelda games for the Nintendo DS feature vehicles in such a prominent way?

DAIKI IWAMOTO It's because we thought [the vehicles] would make for an adventure that was slightly different from the parts where players explore fields and dungeons with Link on foot. By weaving together

the parts where the players explore [by] moving Link freely through the territory, and the "high adventure" parts where they use boats or trains, I think that we not only expanded players' expectations for the next adventure, but also managed to properly use different game styles as a base.

Chancellor Cole and Byrne are two interesting new characters that seem somewhat unique in the Zelda series. Would you say that their personalities and story arcs tie into any overall theme for the game?

In this story, we wanted the enemy characters to have personality, too. They're rivals, so to speak. Byrne

[is a] bad guy but a very cool one, and Chancellor Cole [is the] real villain who uses Byrne. In terms of the flow of the game as a whole, we emphasized Byrne's strength and Chancellor Cole's cowardice, and I think that, among players, it further strengthened the rival relationship during the adventures with Zelda.

It appears that your team put a great deal of effort into finding new and creative uses for the traditional Zelda items and weapons. Was this a goal during development? And do you feel that fans can perhaps become too comfortable with long-running gameplay elements?

When developing Zelda for the Nintendo DS, we always keep our eyes open for interesting ideas we

can put in as we work. We paid particular attention when developing the basic operations and item operations, looking for ways to make the [use of] even the older weapons (such as the bow) surprising [in ways] that could only be performed with the DS. Some players who are used to the conventional button operations may feel a bit bewildered at first, but after they've played for a short while, I think they'll be able to move Link so naturally it will feel as though they've always done it this way.

How would you describe Zelda's personality in this game, and do you feel that any of her traits are unique among the many incarnations of the character?

For this game, it all began with the idea of clearing dungeons by controlling phantoms. Then we thought that if we had Zelda enter the phantoms, the sense of adventuring together would

be even stronger. After that, we thought as long as we're doing that, it would be fun to have Zelda along from start to finish, and so

in this game she becomes a spirit and [teams with Link]. Since she is along for the adventure, rather than having her be a traditional, delicate, dignified "princesslike" character, we made her a bit mischievous, and she seems just like a regular girl. We thought that would keep the adventure from becoming too serious, and that it makes you feel much closer to her and more protective of her. Here, too, people who are used to the former "princess" image may feel a bit off-balance, but in the second half of the game, I'm pretty sure they'll be glad they got to adventure with Zelda.

Where did the idea of collecting bunnies for the Rabbitland Rescue come from? Does someone on the team really like rabbits? And in

general, how would you describe the way that your team approaches humor in Spirit Tracks and in the Zelda series as a whole?

There was a staff member on the team who loved rabbits! In the earliest stages of development, that member told us that they definitely wanted a rabbit in the game. Just then, we were working with the concept that, in scenes when you're riding the train, if you pay close attention to the background, there'll be something good in it for you, so we decided to have rabbits hidden in the shadows of rocks and things like that. It isn't just rabbits, either; we adopted other elements from idle conversations. Someone mentioned having a banditlike character attack the train when you had passengers on board and carry them off, and someone else wanted to have the train run on the ocean floor. We always pay attention when we chat with people, just in case an idea from casual conversation happens to become reality.

It seems that Spirit Tracks, more than perhaps any other Zelda, has a lot of explicit ties to a previous game. Why was this a focus? And, even if it's not an official part of the story, do you have any feelings as to exactly what happened to Tetra, Link, and Linebeck from Phantom Hourglass?

We developed [Spirit Tracks] as the DS sequel, so we did feel that we wanted to keep the atmosphere similar. So, you see, we made a few links between this story and the previous one in order to have a



[Above] While making Spirit Tracks, every member of the development team was encouraged to contribute as many ideas as possible, even wild ones such as running the train under the ocean.



similar atmosphere and characters, and that made it easier to create character settings.

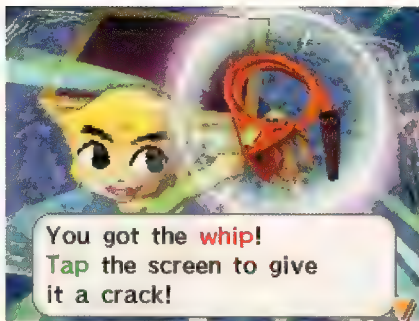
That said, if we'd concentrated too hard on making the game a sequel, people who hadn't played the previous game wouldn't understand this one. We were careful to pay close attention to the parts that would pull people into the story even if they weren't familiar with the previous game. However, we did put in [things] here and there that would let people who had played the previous game grin and think, "Oh, is that what happened to this guy?" We'd like the players to imagine for themselves what happened to Tetra, Link, and Linebeck from the previous game, and we don't talk about it in much detail.

How did the team settle on the Whirlwind, whip, and Sand Wand as the game's new items? Which was thought of first: the items or the types of puzzles that

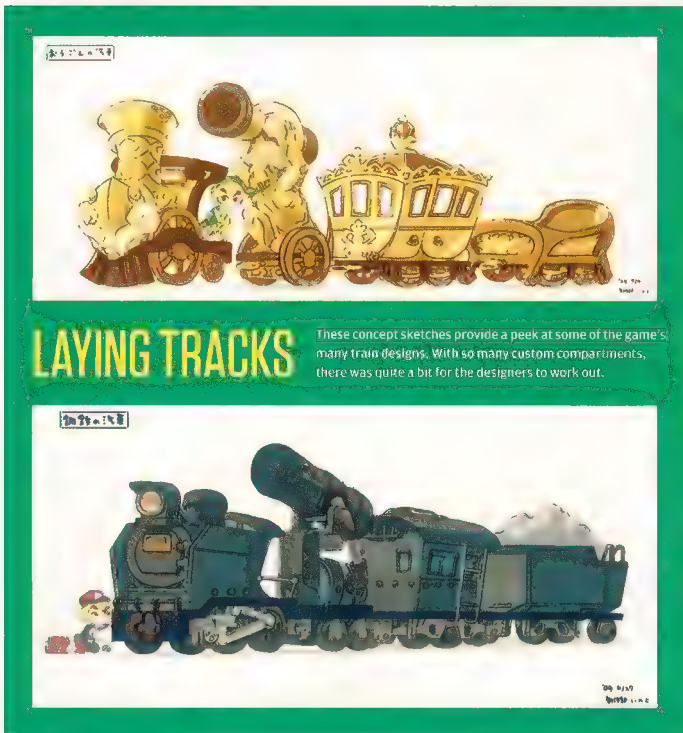
required them?

When coming up with items, our basic policy was to make all the items new ones, except for things that were a hit in the last game and

things we might still be able to use to propose new ways of playing. We kept the boomerang, bow and bombs, and got rid of the grappling hook, Bombchus, and hammer.



[Above] Not only were all-new items added in Spirit Tracks, but returning favorites gained all-new functions. [Right] Depending on how you answer one of Princess Zelda's questions, the ending will change.



These concept sketches provide a peek at some of the game's many train designs. With so many custom compartments, there was quite a bit for the designers to work out.

Then we started by thinking up three items to replace the ones we'd discarded. As much as possible, we specifically tried to think of things with DS-specialized functions, and things that could be used in a number of different ways. We come up with the puzzles not beforehand, but while we think up the item functions and examine the ideas those items give us.

At the climax of the final battle, Link and Zelda deliver a memorable final blow that recalls the ending of The Wind Waker. Was this an intentional reference?

It wasn't on purpose, exactly, but we do put universal emphasis on the drama of Link and Zelda working together to confront a mighty enemy. I think we managed to produce a powerful [final] battle using the two screens.

The ending seems to be somewhat ambiguous with regard to Link and Zelda's future paths. Do you have a sense of how their lives and relationship continue?

It's emphasized that the world is now peaceful, and that its people are beginning to return to their former way of life. Rather than showing everyone what happens between Link and Zelda, I'd like each of the players to imagine it themselves, and bask in the afterglow. By the way, before you fight the last battle, there is a place where Zelda asks you a question. If you choose a different answer to that question, the ending changes just a little bit. I'd like the players to enjoy that part, too.